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## ADVANCED CONSERVATIVE LIBERALISM: PARTY AND PRINCIPLE IN TROLLOPE'S PARLIAMENTARY NOVELS

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*By David M. Craig*

WHEN, ON 17 NOVEMBER 1868, Anthony Trollope came bottom of the poll at Beverley in Yorkshire, his cherished ambition to become a Liberal MP was at an end. He had advocated the key elements of the liberal program – Irish Church disestablishment and national education – but this mattered little in a notoriously corrupt borough which was shortly to be stripped of its representation (Tingay). He later explained in his *Autobiography* (1883) that since he was deprived of a parliamentary seat, he instead used characters in his fiction “for the expression of my political or social convictions... they have served me as safety-valves by which to deliver my soul” (112–13). This reflection starkly conveys the sense of a man literally bursting with opinions, but it sits oddly with the common view of critics that Trollope’s parliamentary novels depicted political life primarily in social terms; that unlike Disraeli he was not especially interested in exploring issues and testing convictions; and that he had “very few political ideas” (Brantlinger 209).<sup>1</sup>

Trollope knew that to make his novels attractive – and successful – he needed to depict the human rather than the abstract dramas of political life, and he understood that writing a novel was not the same as penning an article. This does not mean, however, that he emptied his novels of political beliefs. This, after all, was a man who agreed to edit *Saint Pauls Magazine* so long as he could make it more political than its main competitors. He insisted that “of all the studies to which men and women can attach themselves, that of politics is the first and the finest” (“Introduction” 4). His political journalism and travel writing provide ample evidence of his passionate belief in politics not just as a social whirl but as the highest form of public service. Even if the central themes of his novels were not narrowly political, it is mistaken to suggest that he did not explore questions of political principle in their pages.

Trollope repeatedly attempted to define his political theory. In *Saint Pauls Magazine* (“Whom” 540–41; “New Cabinet” 539), again in *The Prime Minister* (1876) (567–72; ch. 68), and once more in the *Autobiography* (291–95), he explained that there were fundamental theoretical differences between liberalism and conservatism and that they encapsulated opposite understandings of the world. Interestingly, however, his conviction that these positions were antithetical was seemingly compromised by his own stated political beliefs. As every Trollopian knows, he was “an advanced, but still a conservative Liberal,” or,

more succinctly, “an advanced conservative Liberal” (*Autobiography* 182, 183). This was, he insisted, a “rational and consistent” position (*Autobiography* 182).<sup>2</sup> Many critics, however, have not been persuaded and have instead seen it as evidence of a “divided mind” that found it difficult to reconcile the clash between “Logic, Rationality, [and] Utilitarianism” and “Tradition, Custom, [and] Picturesqueness” (Hagan 13). Others have concluded that despite his profession of liberalism – let alone the hint of “advanced” liberalism – he was at heart a conservative who prized traditional practices and hierarchical structures and lamented the destruction of ancient institutions.<sup>3</sup>

One problem with these influential arguments is that they rest on an attenuated account of mid-nineteenth liberalism, a central element of which was that the “law of continuity” was an essential condition of “all political stability” (Jones 55). Even advanced liberals in the 1860s owed their positions more to historical arguments than to utilitarian deductions. Indeed, while most critics latch onto the work done by the adjective “conservative,” very few have considered that by describing himself as “advanced” he was placing himself somewhat to the left of the Whigs. He did not, however, disagree that liberalism was the disinterested rule of a propertied elite, which needed always to listen to the needs of public opinion, but at the same time manage its demands (Parry 178–94; Jones 69–73).<sup>4</sup> Rather than describing him as a kind of closet conservative, this paper shows that Trollope’s “advanced conservative liberalism” was not a confused but a coherent position within liberalism.

In the first section, I assess his views on political motivation. While it is accepted that many of his characters lacked reasoned principles, this did not prevent them from being effective party politicians. However, as I show in the second section, Trollope believed that there were fundamental ideological divisions between the main parties: the Conservatives were the party of reaction and the Liberals the party of progress. Trollope’s central concern was to ensure that progress was achieved appropriately, and that rash measures were not prematurely embraced. In the final section, I look at the role of party: to Trollope the party spectrum and the political structure of Britain were its great strengths, but that at the same time they also generated problems which could thwart the very progress he wished to see. In many ways Trollope was a political idealist, but as an avid enthusiast of Cicero, he very well understood the difficulty in political life of reconciling *utile* with *honestum*.<sup>5</sup>

### I. “Without Any Far-Fetched Reasonings”

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN ARGUED that in his novels Trollope presents politics as little more than a game between parties which were virtually indistinguishable from each other in their pursuit of power and privilege (Cockshut 93–110). More recently, scholars inspired by Hayek and Oakeshott have argued that political action in his novels is not motivated by principles or theories but rather by “irrational” factors such as personal relationships, unquestioned customs, and traditional practices (Hughes; Nardin). There is some truth in this, and Trollope clearly wished to depict political life in all its raw complexity. He accepted that many politicians entered public life for mundane reasons: education, parental pressure, chance openings, and so on, but “without any far-fetched reasonings” (*Autobiography* 184). The Griffenbottoms in *Ralph the Heir* (1871), for instance, take up

this or that side in politics, not from any instructed conviction, not from faith in measures or even in men, nor from adherence either through reason or prejudice to this or that set of political theories – but simply because on this side or that there is an opening. (351; ch. 40)

At elections – whether it was George Vavasor for the Chelsea Districts, Phineas Finn for Tankerville, or Frank Tregear for Polpenno – it was evident that slogans and patronage mattered more than programs and ideals. Of Beverley, Trollope commented that “my political ideas were all leather and prunella to the men whose votes I was soliciting. They cared nothing for my doctrines, and could not even be made to understand that I should have any” (*Autobiography* 187–88). He was just as skeptical about political life inside Parliament, believing that partisan struggle meant that MPs blindly swarmed into lobbies without really thinking about the issues they voted on. For Plantagenet Palliser, this eagerness for party conflict undermined the coolness of mind necessary for proper thought and ensured that many men entered politics “not only without political convictions, but without seeing that it is proper that they should entertain them” (*Prime Minister* 568; ch. 68). There were for Trollope two types of men who lacked principles: ambitious men who wished to climb the greasy pole, for whom he had little respect; and those who simply followed in their family footsteps, towards whom he was more generous.

The first group were “the intriguers, the clever conjurers, to whom politics is simply such a game as is billiards or rackets” (*Autobiography* 184). The exemplary figure here was of course Disraeli. Trollope had little enough respect for him before the passage of the Second Reform Act, but his attitude hardened considerably afterwards. An ostensible review of *Lothair* (1870) was in fact a harsh attack on Disraeli’s seemingly frivolous contempt for the elite, and on his execrable character in general. Trollope advised that in future the aristocracy “will be careful to install in that high place some one less given to conjuring in politics” (“Mr. Disraeli” 449). Only two months after publishing this article, Trollope was hard at work on *Phineas Redux* (1874) which showed that there was nothing – including disestablishment – that Disraeli’s fictional alter-ego, Daubeny, would not do in order to cling to power. He had achieved power by his ingenious rhetorical skills rather than because he represented the best convictions of his party. He was, as Joshua Monk put it, a “political Cagliostro,” and while such a man might be pleasant company if everyone knew him for what he was, “a conjurer who is believed to do his tricks without sleight of hand is a dangerous man” (305; ch. 39). The same held for Sir Timothy Beeswax, who was, by *The Duke’s Children* (1880), Conservative Leader of the House of Commons. He too had mastered a “conjuring phraseology,” peddled a “hocus pocus” system, and had “no idea as to the necessity or non-necessity of any measure whatever in reference to the well-being of the country. It may, indeed, be said that all such ideas were to him absurd” (149, 147; ch. 21). All that he cared about was the shrewd business of managing parliamentary schedules and debates in order to sustain himself in office and further his political ambition. “And this to him was government! It was to these purposes that he conceived that a great statesman should devote himself! Parliamentary management! That in his mind, was under this Constitution of ours the one act essential for government” (182; ch. 26). It is hard to avoid the conclusion here that the narrator’s disgust at this ignoble view of public service was shared by Trollope himself.

To be fair, the Liberals attracted their fair share of unprincipled politicians. In *The Way We Live Now* (1875), the very men who were so vocal about the unsuitability of Melmotte as a politician would happily have served on his election committee if he had chosen to stand as a Liberal rather than as a Conservative (368–69; ch. 44). It was also the Liberal party which attracted villainous adventurers such as George Vavasor and Ferdinand Lopez. Laurence Fitzgibbon in *Phineas Finn* (1869) was a more benign example of the jobbing MP, but the contrast between his cynicism and Finn’s idealism is nevertheless striking. He insisted that it mattered very little which party was in power, because neither really wished to

do anything, and ideas of public service he dismissed as so much nonsense. "Doing things," he explained, "is only bidding for power, – for patronage and pay." It followed that he had no grand ideas about the future of liberalism: "the present Utopia would be good enough" if only he could secure a generous place, "without any work, much to his comfort" (23; ch. 3). What all this shows is that many of Trollope's characters in both parties clearly had little interest in political principles. Some were motivated by ambition for high office, others for comfortable sinecures, and yet more simply for the love of the game, but in no case were these men role models for those entering public life.

In *Ralph the Heir*, Trollope had written of political theories being adhered to by "reason or prejudice" (351; ch. 40). While he did not claim, as Hughes suggests, that "thought cannot be trusted" (41), he did accept that traditional allegiances had a useful role to play. Mabel Grex in *The Duke's Children* was a Conservative because she was "born one" and thought that people should "remain as they are born" (140; ch. 20) while Barrington Erle in *Phineas Finn* was convinced that politicians ought to grow into their convictions gradually. "It ought to be enough for any man, when he begins, to know that he's a Liberal" (555; ch. 67). In *The Prime Minister*, however, Palliser appeared uneasy about the fact that party convictions were often simply a reflection of familial loyalties. "I began life with the misfortune of a ready-made political creed," he mused. "Nobody took the trouble to ask me my opinions. It was a matter of course that I should be a Liberal. . . . It was a tradition of the family" (569; ch. 68). In time he developed his own convictions about why he was a Liberal, but he lamented that too often politicians never got beyond their initial prejudices in favor of their party. In *The Duke's Children*, however, his views were put to the test when his son announced that "I am a Conservative" (50; ch. 7). While Palliser certainly admired politicians with principles, he was not convinced Silverbridge had genuinely worked out a position. He tried to explain the "merits of political Liberalism" (49; ch. 7) but continually slipped back into stressing the allegiances required by family. "The Pallisers have always been Liberal," he confessed. "It will be a blow to me, indeed, if Silverbridge deserts his colours" (32; ch. 5). There is an almost feudal flavor to these remarks, only reinforced by references to "the family doctrine" (34; ch. 5). In effect Palliser wants to visit upon his son the very experiences he himself had complained about in *The Prime Minister*. In the end, it turns out that Silverbridge's opinions are based on shaky foundations, and he returns to the Liberal fold because of his hatred of Beeswax. "Is that your notion of a political opinion?" his friend Tregear berates him. "One is supposed to have opinions of one's own" (388; ch. 55). The suggestion here is that while Tregear's opinions have been worked out sufficiently for him to be a Conservative, Silverbridge's have not, and so it is better that he follows the party and familial traditions with which he has grown up. These "prejudices" may not be as attractive as reasoned convictions, but since they embodied a form of traditional wisdom they were still vastly superior to the unprincipled conjuring of a Cagliostro.

## II. "My Political Theory"

DESPITE OFFERING A DELIBERATELY ambiguous statement of his own political identity, Trollope was adamant about the dichotomy between the ideologies of liberalism and conservatism. "The two regard the whole human race from a different point of view," he argued in *Saint Pauls Magazine*, "and approach all questions of the government of men with theories of governing totally at variance" ("Whom" 541). This was because each approached

the problem of inequality in a different way. Trollope's reasoning here was central to his political thinking.<sup>6</sup> It is self-evident, he argued in the *Autobiography*, that there are appalling inequalities in the world, and also fairly obvious that in most cases the rich have not especially deserved their wealth, nor the poor their poverty. There does not seem to be any justice in the distribution of goods, but, he insisted, we must acknowledge the "hand of God and His wisdom" and that we do not understand "the operations of Almighty wisdom" (182). This latter point was the basis of conservatism: inequality was of divine origin and so it was the duty of the Conservative to preserve it. Hinting at a lineage that stretched back to Filmer, Trollope argued that "The politics of the Tory are patriarchal," and went on to say, witheringly, that "[t]o him it appears almost to be an ordinance of God that society should be composed of a squire in a big house, with a parson below him, with four farmers in a parish, and with a proportion of peasantry living in cottages" ("Whom" 541). Trollope conceded that these Tories possessed a sense of benevolence to those beneath them, but he insisted that their motivation was always to maintain the distances and differences between classes. He agreed with Palliser that if all lords were men with loving hearts, clear intellects, and noble instincts, it was conceivable that conservatism might "spread happiness over the world," but he was shrewd enough to know that they were rarely any such thing (*Prime Minister* 570; ch. 68). The core point, then, about conservatism was its conviction that inequality was divine, could not be eradicated, and ought therefore to be maintained.

By contrast, liberalism was committed to a different vision because it recognized the "equally divine diminution" of inequality over time. Indeed the fact that people experienced "some feeling of injustice, some sting of pain" when contemplating the plight of the poor indicated that the narrowing of the "distances" between classes was part of the providential plan (*Autobiography* 182–83). This was admittedly a slow process, but by a series of steps mankind was heading towards a "human millennium" (*Autobiography* 182–83). It was this desire to achieve equality that enabled Trollope to think himself an advanced Liberal. He was keen to stress, however, that liberalism – unlike republicanism, socialism and communism – rejected the idea that equality could simply be imposed on society, and so he preferred instead to speak of a "tendency to equality" (183). The millennium could not be achieved instantaneously, and it was important that those who desired social and political reform be "hemmed in by safeguards" to ensure that they did not "travel too quickly" (183). This was why the "repressive action" of conservatism was useful. While Conservatives mistakenly opposed change because they thought it was a deviation from divine wisdom, their actions had the practical effect of slowing down change and ensuring it was manageable. "Holding such views," Trollope explained, "I think I am guilty of no absurdity in calling myself an advanced conservative Liberal" (183). What initially seemed to be a contradiction in terms now appears as a complementary fusion: the ends were "advanced" but the means had to be "conservative."

These points can better be appreciated by looking at a metaphor – the coach of reform – that occurs repeatedly in Trollope's fiction. This idea had been in use since at least the 1830s, and he latched on to it as a means of expressing his views. "We all regard our country as a coach which is destined to make progress," he argued in *Saint Pauls Magazine* ("Irish Church Bill" 542), though he recognized in *The Way We Live Now* that some Conservatives would not even concede this: because they occasionally won a seat or two from the Liberals, they were apt to think that "the coach has been really stopped" (451; ch. 54). More sensible Conservatives, such as Arthur Fletcher in *The Prime Minister*, accepted that "The coach has

to be driven somehow. You mustn't stick in the mud, you know" (120; ch. 15). The real issue, then, was the manner in which it was driven. In *Phineas Finn*, those Whigs who were skeptical about further reform thought that while the "coach must be allowed to run down the hill" there needed to be a "drag on both the hind wheels" to prevent it overturning (291–92; ch. 35). Interestingly, however, neither Gresham nor Palliser shared this torpid view of public service. Later, in *The Duke's Children*, Silverbridge argues that Conservatives were needed to prevent dangerous radicals from getting the upper hand, prompting Palliser's reflection that, while a drag on the carriage was necessary, an ambitious person would choose to be "the coachman rather than the drag" (396; ch. 56). In all these instances it is primarily the strength of the parties which determines how much drive and how much drag there is on the coach. Elsewhere Trollope chose to frame the metaphor in institutional terms, sometimes stating that the Commons was the team of horses while the Lords was the brake ("Irish Church Bill" 542); at other times – through Silverbridge – suggesting that public opinion was the driving force and that inside Parliament "everybody will be as conservative as the outside will let them" (*Duke's Children* 535; ch. 76). Whether it was the party system or parliamentary government, Trollope was satisfied that Britain's peculiar constitutional structure ensured that progress could be made without dangerous haste. This is what he had in mind when he commented in *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865) that the "exquisite combination of conservatism and progress" was the strength of Britain (214; ch. 24).

There can be no doubt, however, that ultimately Trollope's sympathies lay on the side of progress. This was made abundantly clear in some illuminating articles in the *Fortnightly Review* where he wrote that it was a national characteristic to "venerate things that are old because they are old" ("Irish Church" 82). Using a range of metaphors that recall Burke – "beautiful ivy," "old walls" ("Public Schools" 476), "dead leaves" ("Irish Church" 86) – he sketched the attractions of ancient institutions, and in doing so seemed to lend force to the image of him as an "irrationalist" and a "conservative." "We love our public schools . . . even their faults," he claimed, so much that "we are half unwilling to sacrifice the picturesque to the useful" ("Public Schools" 476). Similarly, the Irish Church was one of those institutions which was honored by time but was "absurdly unfitted" for the present day: the issue was not its "antiquity" but its "utility" ("Irish Church" 82, 84). In the heart of every person, Trollope claimed, there was a clash between the conservative who wanted to maintain old things and the liberal who wanted to reform them. While ultimately "reason within us gets the better of feeling" the long "internal debate and painful struggle" ensured that nothing was reformed prematurely ("Public Schools" 476). When the process of removal did eventually occur, the "old timber" was dragged away with "loving hands," and so the ground was cleared for "purposes of new utility" ("Irish Church" 83). Trollope appreciated the *emotional* pull of conservatism, but ultimately it was subordinate to his *rational* liberalism. Even though it was doomed always to fail, the conservative tendency ensured that progress was safe and steady.

How did Trollope depict Conservatives and Liberals in his novels? This is an important question because parties in this period were by no means cohesive either organizationally or ideologically (Beales; Jenkins). The Conservative split over the Corn Laws in 1846 led to a decade of tension between a Conservative core led by Derby and Disraeli and a talented but diminishing band of Peelites. Whether their most brilliant member – Gladstone – would return to the Conservative fold or would join the Liberals was a persistent source of interest in the 1850s. Liberalism, meanwhile, was, as the Earl of Clarendon put it, a "great bundle of sticks" (Parry 194). Embracing everything from Palmerston's cautious centrism – designed

to win support from moderate Conservatives – through Russell’s reformist Whiggism to the radicalism of Cobden and Bright, it was a very broad political party. Certainly, by the 1860s, the Liberal Party was an electoral force to be reckoned with, but its internal disagreements were made all too evident by its disastrous defeat in the election of 1874. Since, then, there was a spectrum of belief across and within parties, how did Trollope sustain the idea of two opposing ideologies?

Taking the Conservatives first, the central theme that emerges is that while “staunch old Tories” had remained true to their core beliefs, all too often their leaders had betrayed party principles in the search for popularity.<sup>7</sup> Among these beliefs was, first, the firm defense of the Church of England and opposition to concessions to “godless” Dissenters as well as to Catholics. One “very conservative” character lamented that MPs no longer agreed on “vital subjects” such as the importance of religion (*Duke’s Children* 388; ch. 55). There were, of course, some exceptions: Abel Wharton in *The Prime Minister* was in many ways a traditional Tory, but he respected religious toleration (25; ch. 3), while Tregear in *The Duke’s Children* thought anti-dissenting sentiments were reactionary and old-fashioned (388; ch. 55). Nevertheless, it was because Anglicanism was so central to conservatism that Trollope had Daubeny propose disestablishment – “worse than Free Trade or Household Suffrage” (58; ch. 8) – in *Phineas Redux* to illustrate his lack of principles. Second, traditional Tories opposed political reform. Miss Thorne in *Barchester Towers* (1857) still found it difficult to swallow the First Reform Act (184; ch. 22), while Jemima Stanbury in *He Knew He Was Right* (1869) was so disgusted by the Second that she toyed with supporting anti-reform Liberals (57; ch. 7). In *Phineas Finn*, Mr. Low provided a more considered argument about why the franchise should not be extended. He wanted to be governed “by law and not by caprice,” and thought the unreformed Parliament did a thoroughly good job. “If I thought that Parliament as at present established made the laws badly, I would desire a change; but I doubt whether we shall have them better from any change in Parliament which Reform will give us” (296; ch. 35). Finally, traditional Tories supported the “rights” of the landed classes, and were reluctant to abandon protectionism. Mr. Thorne and Dr. Grantly in *Barchester Towers* both thought that the fifty-three Tories who refused to endorse the party’s belated conversion to free trade in 1852 were “the only patriots” left among public men (181, 192; chs. 22, 23). In the 1870s we find, in *The Prime Minister*, Alured Wharton becoming deeply anxious about his heir’s new-fangled ideas about the rights of tenants (585, 633–34, 636; chs. 70, 75), while Silverbridge in *The Duke’s Children* explained to his father that he had become a Conservative “to protect our position. . . . The people will look after themselves, and we must look after ourselves” (50; ch. 7).

In *Lord Palmerston* (1882) Trollope stated that the “last really Tory government in England . . . was that of Lord Liverpool and Lord Eldon” (32). The true heart of conservatism was opposition to all the reforms enacted since the 1820s. Trollope’s Conservatives often voice the beliefs that the country had “gone to the dogs” and that true national glory was only to be found in the past.<sup>8</sup> Jemima Stanbury talked of the glories of the reigns of George III and George IV, and kept a bust of Lord Eldon before which she was accustomed to weep (*He Knew He Was Right* 68; ch. 7). Others looked back even further: Lily Dale in *The Small House at Allington* (1864) thought Charles I was just about the “best man in history” (444; ch. 44) while Alured Wharton in *The Prime Minister* believed Britain would have been a great nation if “Charles I had never had his head cut off, and if the Georges had never come from Hanover” (107; ch. 13). By presenting Conservatives as reactionaries who could



not adjust to change, Trollope was doing much more than simply mocking them. Instead he was showing them as they *ought* to be: their very purpose *was* to resist progress and to defend “all that was left of old, and dear, and venerable in the Constitution” (*Phineas Redux* 36; ch. 5). In doing this they helped to stabilize the very change they opposed. They were, however, deluded if they thought that, by putting their shoulders to the wheel, they could turn back time.

A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, – and the old day will come back again. Venerable patriarchs think of Lord Liverpool and other heroes, and dream dreams of Conservative bishops, Conservative lord-lieutenants, and of a Conservative ministry that shall remain in for a generation. (*Way We Live Now* 451; ch. 54)

The tone invites readers to laugh at such nonsense, but at the same time the passage also conveys what Trollope thought true conservatism was about – not the presentation of new reforms but the resistance to those proposed by others.

The march of progress was made worse for Conservatives by the treacherous behavior of their leaders. Rather than present Peel and Disraeli as men who had tried to broaden the electoral appeal of conservatism, Trollope preferred to depict them as men who defied its very spirit. Peel came in for a surprising amount of criticism because of his changes of mind over Catholic Emancipation, the Reform Act and the Corn Laws. Mr. Thorne, in *Barchester Towers*, despaired that his party had been ruined by the “apostasy of those who had been regarded as the truest of true believers” (182; ch. 22), while in *The Three Clerks* (1859) it was suggested that posterity would point to Peel as “a politician without policy, as a statesman without a principle, as a worshipper at the altar of expediency, to whom neither vows sworn to friends, nor declarations made to his country, were in any way binding” (342–43; ch. 30). He went on to ask (in a prefiguring of the plot of *Phineas Redux*) whether, if Peel had lived, and if the people had demanded that the Church, the Lords and the Crown be abolished, “who can believe that Sir Robert Peel would not be ready to carry out their views?” (343; ch. 30). Disraeli was no better – and probably worse – in Trollope’s eyes. When Daubeny announced his support for disestablishment in *Phineas Redux* he claimed to have discovered that conservatism required “changing everything in the Constitution” and that “audacity in Reform was the very backbone of Conservatism” (35, 256; chs. 5, 33). “Was nothing to be conserved by a Conservative party?” asked the narrator wearily (59; ch. 8). Disraeli’s attempt to set himself up as a reformer was treated as contradictory nonsense. In *The Way We Live Now* the narrator spoke contemptuously of a leader “whose eloquence has been employed in telling us that progress can only be expected from those whose declared purpose is to stand still” (573; ch. 69). While Disraeli’s “conjuring” was one aspect of his character that disgusted Trollope, his blatant contempt for the very principles and traditions of the party he was meant to lead was another.

These repeated betrayals were beginning to erode the very core of the party. In *He Knew He Was Right*, Mrs. Clifford despises “a certain leading politician” who had “with the cunning of the devil, tempted and perverted the virtue of her own political friends” (401; ch. 48). It was becoming increasingly apparent that Conservatives were learning that having convictions got them nowhere. As the Liberal Ratler, noted, “They’ve been so knocked about by one treachery after another that they don’t care now for anything beyond their places” (*Phineas Redux* 37; ch. 5). They might in their hearts hate all these measures, but few had

the guts anymore to oppose them, insisting that a “party has to be practical.” But, as the narrator countered, even a party “must draw the line somewhere” (59; ch. 8). A party that required little in the way of conviction proved an attractive proposition to an unprincipled adventurer like Melmotte, a man who “knew nothing of the working of parliament, nothing of nationality, – had no preference whatever for one form of government over another, never having given his mind a moment’s trouble on the subject” (*Way We Live Now* 453–54; ch. 54). It is worth noting that after Melmotte’s disgrace, when no MP will deign to introduce him to the Commons, “the very leader of the party” – almost certainly intended to be Disraeli – happily did so (575; ch. 69). The party knew it had to get rid of men like Daubeny and Beeswax – “they were uncomfortable, – and perhaps a little ashamed” of such leaders – but there were no obvious replacements (*Duke’s Children* 150; ch. 21). While Trollope himself opposed conservatism, he still thought it ought to be able properly to represent its views, and advised that it was in “great danger” under men like Disraeli, and that it should in future choose its leaders more carefully (“Disraeli” 451).

As the party of progress, it was the duty of liberalism, not conservatism, to pursue reform. Trollope’s articles in *Saint Pauls Magazine* repeatedly made explicit his exasperation with Conservative opportunism, and his conviction that reform measures were safest in the hands of the reform party (“Whom” 534–39; “Irish Church Debate” 150). However, if the problem of betrayal was one that beset conservatism in his novels, the corresponding problem for liberalism was fragmentation. In the 1850s, as in *Doctor Thorne* (1858), Whigs and Radicals were described as “differing altogether in politics” (172; ch. 15). By the 1860s, as in reality, the developing *rapprochement* between these groups was symbolized by the way that they met together at the prime minister’s house to discuss the forthcoming parliamentary session (*Phineas Finn* 134–35; ch. 17). There was no doubt, however, that the central problem for Liberals was disagreement over the extent of required reforms, and the rapidity with which they could be implemented. Time and again, the party struggled to keep its advanced and moderate wings together, and it was this struggle which supplied much of the political interest of the parliamentary novels. The “party” aspect of this issue will be discussed later, but here we need to consider the implications of these divisions for the way that liberalism was presented. Just how cohesive was the liberalism Trollope described?

In the early parliamentary novels, the Whig element of liberalism was in the ascendant. It was presented as socially exclusive, but absolutely convinced of its historical role as a servant of the people. The exemplary – and recurring – figure is the Duke of St. Bungay, the “aristocratic pillar of the British Constitutional Republic,” and a key player in Whig governments since the 1830s (*Can You Forgive Her?* 218; ch. 24). As *Phineas Finn* opens, the government, led by Mildmay, is trying to steer through a moderate measure of reform. While it wanted a generous extension of the franchise, it was opposed to the secret ballot and radical redistribution (134; ch. 17). Indeed Whig skepticism about the ballot was evident in *Can You Forgive Her?* when St. Bungay confessed his hatred of it, and that this was why, even though he had voted for every serious liberal measure, he had not “been able to get beyond Whiggery yet” (204; ch. 23).<sup>9</sup> It also becomes apparent in *Phineas Finn* that deep down most Whigs do not really support further political reform, and only concede the issue in order to prevent something more radical being forced upon them (291; ch. 35). Similarly, the issue of disestablishment was felt most painfully by Whigs such as Barrington Erle. He found himself “suffering under a real political conviction for once in his life” and hoped there would be a “positive and chivalric defence of the Church” (*Phineas Redux* 61;

ch. 8). By the time of *The Prime Minister*, St. Bungay was arguing that extending the county franchise was “wholly undesirable,” leading the narrator to comment that there must have been “a shade of melancholy on that old man’s mind as, year after year, he assisted in pulling down institutions which he in truth regarded as the safeguards of the nation – but which he knew that, as a Liberal, he was bound to assist in destroying!” (574; ch. 68). Such comments seem to expose the tensions between a Whiggish desire to preserve institutions and a Liberal desire to reform them. Elsewhere, Trollope even hinted that the liberalism of some Whigs was tenuous. Erle was told by Laura Kennedy that he only called himself “a Liberal simply because Fox was a Liberal a hundred years ago,” and Finn – in response to a comment about the need to keep the mob down – thought he was “no more a Liberal at heart than was Mr. Daubeny. . . . [He] has been receiving Whig wages all his life” (*Phineas Finn* 186, 209; chs. 23, 26).

At the other end of the spectrum were the advanced liberals or radicals. It is generally accepted that Trollope disliked radicals, but, as we shall see later, it would be more true to say that he disliked certain types of “independent” radical. The two most important figures in the parliamentary novels are Turnbull and Monk: their beliefs were much the same, they were once good friends, and had together spent much of the 1850s lambasting every government for its failures, though they differed in their attitudes to holding office. In describing – or gently mocking – the beliefs of Turnbull in *Phineas Finn*, Trollope offered a thumb-nail sketch of contemporary radicalism:

Progressive reform in the franchise, of which manhood suffrage should be the acknowledged and not far distant end, equal electoral districts, ballot, tenant right for England as well as Ireland, reduction of the standing army till there should be no standing army to reduce, utter disregard of all political movements in Europe, an almost idolatrous admiration for all political movements in America, free trade in everything except malt, and an absolute extinction of a State Church. (143; ch. 18)

Monk was largely in agreement with this agenda. Although he opposed the ballot on the grounds that every man who possessed the vote should “dare to have and to express a political opinion of his own,” he certainly thought more extensive political reform was needed (159; ch. 20). He believed that the purpose of representation was not to elect the best members, but to ensure that the assembly was an accurate mirror of the people; and to that end he was one of the keenest advocates of the County Suffrage Bill in *The Prime Minister*. Monk also supported disestablishment of Church and State, although – unlike Turnbull – not at the hands of Conservatives, and was a firm advocate of tenant right in Ireland. While some of these positions went beyond what Trollope himself advocated, they were nevertheless seen as the sorts of advanced views that could – broadly – be contained within the Liberal party.

The space between Whig caution and Radical impetuosity was one that deeply interested Trollope, and a number of his characters are found agonizing about where on the spectrum to plant themselves. Finn, for example, generally comes to adopt positions held by Monk: he opposes the ballot, supports tenant right, embraces disestablishment, and desires county suffrage reform. He also has ideas about increasing municipal independence in Ireland which causes anxiety for other members of the coalition government (*Prime Minister* 222, 306; chs. 27, 37). Gresham – sometimes thought to be modeled on Gladstone – is also difficult to locate. Unlike Whigs, he genuinely desired political reform in *Phineas Finn*, and, perhaps more strikingly, thought that disestablishment “has to be done” because the union of Church

and State “is unfitted for that condition of humanity to which we are coming, and if so, the change must be for the good” (*Phineas Redux* 39; ch. 5). Ultimately, however, it is Palliser who exemplifies both “advanced” and “conservative” tendencies. Take, for example, his stance as Prime Minister on the County Suffrage Bill. St. Bungay advises him to delay it, while Monk insists they press on. Finn suggests that it is a measure which will bring them one step further “towards that millennium of which we were talking” to which Palliser coldly replies that such speculations cannot stand the pressures of daily life (*Prime Minister* 601; ch. 72). He is torn in two directions. “There was no doubt to him but that the measure was desirable and would come, but there might well be a question as to the time at which it should be made to come” (574; ch. 68). Trollope made much the same point in his “Introduction” to *Saint Pauls Magazine*, written shortly after the passing of household suffrage. “Who is there that will say that he is a not a Reformer? . . . And who is there also that does not feel himself to be a Conservative” while the new suffrage was untested (4). He saw that radical measures would come sooner or later, and that many of them were desirable, but the question was whether they were appropriate at the present moment.

Since liberalism was a doctrine of progress, its supporters were constantly required to adapt their views. This was a point made by Trollope’s sub-editor, who argued that the issues at stake between the parties were always changing. “The goal of one era is the starting-point of the next,” and that the most bigoted Tories of the present day “are infinitely more liberal” than the reforming Roundheads of the seventeenth century (Dicey 659). The ironic effects of progress on personal beliefs were not missed by Trollope. In *Phineas Redux* he noted that when household suffrage was passed, it was only twenty years ago that even the most advanced Liberal agonized over whether to support it (59; ch. 8). The same progress was at work on issues such as tenant right and disestablishment. An issue which was once “chimerical” will eventually come to be regarded as “difficult.” “And so in time it will come to be looked on as among the things possible, then among the things probable” until it becomes a measure which the country needs (*Phineas Finn* 618; ch. 75). “That is the way public opinion is made” (*Phineas Finn* 618; ch. 75). The key question, then, for any politician, was getting the timing right. The end of *Phineas Finn* sees the young Irishman effectively sacrifice his political career because of his insistence on supporting tenant right; but, when he returns to politics in *Phineas Redux*, the reader learns that the measure had since been passed. Finn had been “driven out into the cold” simply because he was twelve months “in advance of his party” (4; ch. 1). It initially appears that his stance on disestablishment might lead to the same fate, because this was an issue where the leadership believed that “the fruit was not yet ripe” and so should not be picked (33; ch. 5). It remained a matter of prudence to decide which issues were supported by the public, and which issues could be safely held at bay. A man like St. Bungay would apply the brake to the wheels, while a man like Monk desired to drive the coach forward. Trollope believed that safe driving required both men.

### III. “Men are the Means to Measures”

THE FINAL ISSUE TO CONSIDER IS the role of party in Trollope’s “political theory,” for there is some ambivalence in his views between loyalty to party and support for independence. The idea of “independence” had its roots in eighteenth-century hostility to faction, but continued to prove attractive to nineteenth-century radicals who distrusted aristocratic politics, whether Whig or Tory. The putative advantage of independence was that the politician could espouse

the causes he believed without sacrificing his principles to a party. At the same time, however, partisan loyalty – especially during times of crisis – could be strong, even in the fluid 1850s (Beales; Hawkins). It would seem that party and independence co-existed: “party leaders could never presume upon the support of their back-benchers, who jealously preserved for themselves a degree of latitude, or ‘independence,’ in their political conduct” (Jenkins 37). By the early 1870s there was a steady decline in allegiance to “independence” as a growing number of former radicals felt they could work within the Liberal party, and as popular liberals in the country felt more trusting towards the parliamentary party (Taylor 345–46).

There seem to be good reasons, initially, for thinking that Trollope was skeptical, even cynical, about the nature of party. We have already seen his concern about the corrosive effect of partisan fervor on political principles. This unease went back a long way. In *The New Zealander*, written between 1855 and 1856, he outlined his view that representative assemblies – in this case the House of Commons – were intended “to guard the welfare, and watch the best interests” of the whole nation, but that they failed in this when “individual antagonism and party contests” predominated (118). In the Commons, he explained, partisan attachment was widely accepted: men would debate and vote according to the requirements of the party rather than the facts. “If it be necessary to decide whether Black be Black, or whether it be not rather in all respects White, men will go into different lobbies on the matter; and according to the power of parties at the moment” (121–22). Similarly, the best attended debates were not those which concerned the most important public matters, but those in which the leading personalities clashed most vividly (118). These points were conveyed rather poignantly in *Can You Forgive Her?* (414–16; ch. 45) and *Phineas Redux* (574; ch. 73). In each case a conscientious MP rose to propose some legislation on which he had been hard at work, and which would improve the lot of humanity. The measure was not a party issue, however, and MPs instead swarmed out of the doors like flocks of sheep. As the House was counted out, the MP realized that the newspapers would not report his speech, that no one would listen to his arguments, and that all his work was in vain. The politicians were happy to hear vigorous attacks on the Prime Minister, even if the speaker was a worthless scoundrel, but to “sink from that to private legislation . . . was to fall into a bathos which gentlemen could not endure” (*Phineas Redux* 574; ch. 73). These examples certainly suggest that Trollope was not optimistic about the effects of party on political ideals and public service.

A different perspective is offered by *Saint Pauls Magazine*. Trollope was, in the mid-to late-1860s, writing political journalism and preparing to stand for Parliament. He also reflected that the inability of Liberals to patch up their differences was being ably exploited by Conservatives: more party loyalty was needed if genuine reform was to be passed. At the same time as he was making this case, *Phineas Finn* was being serialized in *Saint Pauls Magazine*, and this novel explores questions of party allegiance and the nature of independence in a manner which is more ambivalent than his articles. As an essayist, his views on party were clear. He accepted that it was impossible to create a party in which there was “no divergence of ideas, no difference of opinion” and that while members of a government could be expected to act in unison, this could not be demanded of the wider party, let alone the independents. “How shall you argue with a man that he is bound in conscience to give up the crotchet to which he finds that his conscience directs him?” (“Whom” 533–34). Nevertheless, he went on, no practical measure could be achieved unless men bound themselves to a party. The Conservatives had already learned this lesson. If they

could remain united as a party even while they passed measures – such as the Second Reform Act – which each member found “abominable, antagonistic to his own instincts, odious to his own feelings, subversive of his own modes of thinking and of living” then surely the Liberals could. There should be “no obstacle, no invincible difficulty” in bringing the party together “for purposes which are dear to each individual, which are in accordance with his instincts, which suit his feelings, and which satisfy his modes of thought and of life” even if there may be disagreements over the time and extent of the measures (“Whom” 534). Without a Liberal party, there could be no Liberal measures.

The strongest advocate of party in the parliamentary novels is Erle. He is a devout Whig who believes in the “patriotism of certain families” and that since they had been trained to “regard the well-being of their country as their highest personal interest” the best thing for mere mortal members was obedience (*Phineas Redux* 155; ch. 20). “He was convinced that Liberal politics were good for Englishmen, and that Liberal politics and the Mildmay party were one and the same thing.” When the young Finn declares he wants “not to support a party, but to do the best I can for the country,” Erle “turned away in disgust. Such language was to him simply disgusting.” He hated the “very name” of independence, and distrusted anyone – including Monk – who seemed to advocate measures not men (*Phineas Finn* 13; ch. 2). In *Phineas Redux* he told Finn bluntly that despite having supported disestablishment at the Tankerville election, he will have to vote against it in Parliament, pointing out that his Tory opponent, Browborough, had attacked it during the election campaign and yet “voted like a man with his party” (102; ch. 13). Later, he explained that even though he personally disliked disestablishment, he will loyally support the measure if the leader of the party does. “There are no other ideas on which things can be made to work. Were it not that men get drilled into it by the force of circumstances any government in this country would be impossible” (152; ch. 20). This was the standard defence of the role of parties in parliamentary government, and one that Trollope supported. At the same time, however, he also depicted Erle as an over-zealous supporter of party whose principles had been almost eroded by supine loyalty (“Characters” 255). When Finn explained that he must leave the government because of his convictions about tenant right, Erle scoffed, “Convictions! There is nothing on earth that I’m so much afraid of in a young member of Parliament as convictions” (*Phineas Finn* 555; ch. 67).

The opposing stance was most robustly advanced by Turnbull, who, most likely, was based on John Bright. Trollope makes it transparent that he has little time for demagogues who pride their independence above all else (*Phineas Redux* 262; ch. 34). Turnbull’s argument was that he was sent to Parliament to serve the people, and to take office under the Crown would require him to abandon them. He sees the two types of service as antithetical, whereas Trollope thought the truest way to serve the people was through government. Turnbull disavows any interest in the party affiliation of the men who hold office, and is only interested in the measures that they support. So, in *Phineas Finn*, he ends up destabilizing the Liberal government by pushing for the ballot and for extensive redistribution, while in *Phineas Redux* he helps maintain the Conservative government by registering his support for the proposed measure of disestablishment. Although he dislikes Daubeney, “the thing now offered was too good to be rejected, let it come from what quarter it would” (*Phineas Redux* 67; ch. 9). The narrator thinks that Turnbull has it easy:

Having nothing to construct, he could always deal with generalities. Being free from responsibility, he was not called upon either to study details or to master even great facts. . . . It was his work to cut

down forest-trees, and he had nothing to do with the subsequent cultivation of the land. (*Phineas Finn* 143; ch. 18)

Even when Liberals and Conservatives attempt to put party aside in *The Prime Minister*, Turnbull was not attracted and insisted that he could never allow himself to “agree with a Minister on any point” (95; ch. 12). He is like Cato, whom Trollope compared unfavorably to Cicero, because by refusing to get his hands dirty – supporting a party, joining a government – he simply ends up being “unpractical and useless” (“Cicero” 504).

If Turnbull is the inflexible face of independence, then Monk is its ideal realized, and quite possibly the unsung hero of Trollope’s parliamentary novels. It seems very likely his political character was modeled on the independent Liberal – and personal friend – Charles Buxton, whose *Ideas of the Day on Policy* was reviewed by Trollope in the *Fortnightly Review* (Butte “Duke” 212–15). In most cases, Trollope argued, politicians either supported government and abandoned their principles or committed themselves to a life of ineffectual independence, but Buxton was a man who was constantly trying to balance these positions. Reminding us of the Ciceronian dilemma, Trollope referred to the “combat that is always going on within Mr. Buxton’s breast between utility and honesty, and of the effort which he is ever making to combine two things which appear to his clear vision to be hardly compatible” (“Ideas” 650–51). This struggle is exemplified by Monk’s career. Unlike Erle, he was a man of convictions, but unlike Turnbull, he believed it was his duty to join government when an opportunity arose to put them into effect. When in *Phineas Finn* Turnbull needled him about whether he had any real influence in cabinet, Monk replied that he hoped he might “leaven the batch of bread . . . giving to the whole batch more of the flavour of reform” than it would otherwise have (145; ch. 18). As the novel wears on, however, it becomes clear that Monk has doubts about whether he had in fact been of service, and he begins to feel that by agitating for tenant right he could at the very least educate public opinion (241, 535–36, 618; chs. 29, 65, 75). His resignation, however, does not prompt him to return to an uncompromising “measures not men” position. In *Phineas Redux* there is much speculation that he will follow Turnbull and support disestablishment, but in fact he opposes it, arguing that “a difference in men meant a difference in measures. The characters of men whose principles were known were guarantees for the measures they would advocate” (270; ch. 35). This was a reiteration of Trollope’s point in *Saint Pauls Magazine* that “men are the means to measures” (“Whom” 535). By *The Prime Minister* and *The Duke’s Children* Monk was a model politician who had disproved his own earlier belief that a man who had made his mark through independent action could never make a successful statesman (*Phineas Finn* 270; ch. 35). Trollope respected a man who could mix the loyalty to party necessary to achieve anything with the principled stance so often associated only with independents, and perhaps for that reason it is significant that the parliamentary novels end with Monk as Prime Minister.

One possible solution to the excesses of party was a government which drew on “all the talents” irrespective of their party affiliation. The idea of “patriot” governments had been popular in the eighteenth century, and retained some appeal into the nineteenth. The 1850s, for instance, had seen a formal coalition under Aberdeen, while Palmerston engineered an alliance between Peelites, Whigs, and radicals. One of themes of *The Prime Minister* was whether a coalition could overcome the attachments of party. The narrator conceded that “coalitions of this kind have generally been feeble, sometimes disastrous, and on occasions,

even disgraceful. When a man, perhaps through long political life, has bound himself to a certain code of opinions, how can he change that code at a moment?" (57; ch. 8).<sup>10</sup> Despite resistance from some Liberals and Conservatives, it initially appears that the government does rather well, leading some pundits to speculate that perhaps coalitions were the "proper thing" after all (94; ch. 12). It did not take long, however, for politicians to feel their ambition being stifled, for members to become restless at the lack of a good fight, and for the old party leaders to seem "eager for the battle" (533; ch. 63). As the coalition unravels, Finn concludes that while it had served the country well, it was time for normal relations to resume (567, 614–15; chs. 68, 73). Monk's comments to Palliser in the final chapter are perceptive, and convey much of Trollope's own sentiments. He reflected that

men who have been brought up with opinions altogether different, even with different instincts as to politics, who from their mother's milk have been nourished on codes of thought altogether opposed to each other, cannot work together with confidence even though they may desire the same thing. (678–79; ch. 80)

It is the final point that was most galling: even though men might have similar principles, they could not overcome their more primeval party prejudices and animosities. Despite his conviction that party was essential, Trollope retained a nagging sense that an excess of partisanship could subvert the nobler ends of politics.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

TROLLOPE WAS BOTH AN "ADVANCED LIBERAL" and a "conservative Liberal." He did not believe that the inherited distances between classes could be justified, and often lamented the undeserved intellectual and material impoverishment of the lower orders. He accepted that there must be a transformation in the structure of old-world society but, with many other nineteenth-century Liberals, he rejected the fervor of revolutionaries who believed that this world could be transformed overnight. Again, as with many other Liberals, he accepted that the framework of the constitution enabled sound government and ensured the progressive requirements of public opinion could be safely implemented. This meant that, as John Burrow has written in regards to Bagehot, "stability and progress" could be balanced (Collini 167). At the same time as he advocated reforms on the grounds of justice, Trollope happily confessed that that they might not always increase his personal happiness; but he knew that, in the clash between reason and feelings, reason would ultimately prevail. He was neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but a meliorist, and, like Palliser in *The Duke's Children*, he recognized that he must face up to the democratic future with quiet and cautious hope.

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#### **NOTES**

Many thanks to Jonathan Parry and James Thompson for their perceptive comments on this article.

1. For various examples see Cockshut 103–05; Tracy 101–03; McMaster 38–39; Hughes 32–34; Wall 126, 133, 188–89.



2. The frequently cited 1883 and 1923 editions of the *Autobiography* instead refer to "Conservative-Liberal," whereas "conservative Liberal" is the capitalisation based on Trollope's manuscript.
3. See, for example, Escott 166; Cockshut 177; Halperin 10, 14, 20–22, 221, 284–85; Tracy 81, 87, 90–91, 101–02; Durey 132–33. For a contrast see Butte, "Review" 519–21.
4. For Trollope's stance on specific issues see his essays in the *Fortnightly Review* and *Saint Pauls Magazine* and his election addresses cited in Tingay.
5. The importance of Cicero is established by apRoberts and Butte, "Duke."
6. For discussions of this point see Tracy 77–79; Butte, "Duke" 216–17, but a fuller examination of his ideas about equality, class, and providence would be welcome.
7. Variations on the phrase "staunch Tories of the old school" abound: *Phineas Finn* 214, ch. 26; *He Knew He Was Right* 57, ch. 7; *Phineas Redux* 65, 562, chs. 9, 71; *The Way We Live Now* 451, ch. 54; *The Prime Minister* 51, ch. 7; 70, ch. 9; 174, ch. 21; 468, ch. 56; 568, 572, ch. 68; *The Duke's Children* 47, ch. 7.
8. This phrase is also used repeatedly: *Ralph the Heir* 127, ch. 14; *Phineas Redux* 59, ch. 8; 98, ch. 13; *The Way We Live Now* 463, ch. 55; *The Prime Minister* 107, ch. 13; 120, ch. 15; 339, ch. 41; *Autobiography* 219–20.
9. Interestingly there were also advanced liberals – Finn and Monk – who opposed the ballot, as did Trollope himself: Tingay 31.
10. Victorian views of coalitions are discussed in Searle 1–25, while Berger assesses Trollope's views.

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